



# Nova Scotia Community Housing Sector: Visibility, Voice and Collaboration

The *Build Together* project evolved through a desire to raise awareness of the Community Housing Sector (CHS) and to explore opportunities to support non-profit and co-operative housing organizations in their efforts to create affordable, accessible, and inclusive housing in their communities. One challenge in this process is that the concept of a “sector” is not immediately recognized in Nova Scotia, not even among such organizations. Early in the process, a long-time volunteer in non-profit housing bluntly commented, “I didn’t know we were part of a sector!” This speaks to the uphill battle community housing organizations face to demonstrate to policy makers, funders, and the broader community the vital role they can and do play in addressing the growing housing crisis in this province.

Visibility is linked to funding as the *Build Together* consultation participants noted the disconnect between the ways the CHS works and the requirements for accessing funding available to create affordable housing. Participants speak of “red tape” application procedures designed for large-scale projects and urban contexts that are beyond the scope of organizations seeking local-scale solutions in smaller communities and in rural regions. They also call for “plain language” application materials. They see this disconnect arising, in part, from the lack of recognition of the sector’s existence and the ways in which they operate. Notably, they argue that the scale at which they operate is the most adaptable, cost-effective, and responsive to the communities they serve.

“We are all working in silos, put people together. A lot of us have good ideas, but us together under one umbrella might help. Let’s see what everyone is doing. See how we can save time and money.”



Examples of comments regarding visibility:

- Awareness raising on the role the non-profit sector plays and can play in the future to improve access to affordable housing
- Inventory of “who is out there”
- Desire to coordinate efforts to overcome the current “piecemeal” approach
- Collective voice to promote the sector

## Community-Led and Holistic Approaches

The CHS brings to the fore the inclusion of people’s perspectives and rights as residents of this province. These rights cannot be expressed without meaningful avenues for participation. The CHS is aware of the opportunity to bring a holistic approach to community renewal through housing that addresses environmental, cultural, and social priorities to improve community sustainability and wellbeing. They speak to the importance of affordable housing being available within communities with access to transit, culture, parklands, shops, and services. “With community participation, the indicators of a vibrant community tend to draw attention to the importance of local services and mixed housing so that affordable housing options are not “blocks at the fringes” of towns.” The CHS promotes longer-term planning that ensures people can remain in their communities regardless of changes in their life circumstances and can “age in place.”



# Collaboration Locally and Provincially

The sector recognizes the need for their membership and staff to develop greater skills for developing, funding, and implementing affordable housing solutions. Many of the capacity building goals identified draw on a desire to learn from each other, to share knowledge, and to reflect the sector's values in human rights, dignity, and care for all in the community.

Organizations know their communities. Where they want to strengthen their learning is through improved connections with other organizations to seek solutions. They recognize the need for a space to gather and share information, contacts for assistance, and navigation in processes like proposal writing and identifying funding avenues and supports. In the Build Together engagement sessions, people expressed gratitude for meeting others, finding new groups, and wanting to build on learning from each other so they can pool their knowledge and resources. They seek ways to do this by identifying the groups and “having a body that can go to bat for us” and “that would give us a collective voice.” They expressed a desire to share knowledge and expertise, so they are not in competition but working towards addressing the greatest need. Awareness raising of available funding opportunities and how this information is shared with organizations in the sector was also noted. Groups want to learn from past successes and existing research and knowledge to harmonize work across the province, to remove “silos” and avoid “reinventing the wheel.”

“There are little nuggets of activity happening around the province. I hope we can connect these better and learn from each other.”

This series of thematic briefs draws upon what the Build Together team heard from the community housing sector in Nova Scotia through several consultations and a survey conducted in the spring of 2021. This brief was written by Catherine Irving with input from the Build Together team members.

